

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 14300

STATE FOR EA/J MR. SHERMAN

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, JA

SUBJECT: STATUS OF TANAKA GOVERNMENT

REF: TOKYO 13970

SUMMARY: WHILE PRIME MINISTER TANAKA'S ABSENCE FROM THE COUNTRY HAS REDUCED THE AMOUNT OF MEDIA ATTENTION TO HIS POLITICAL PROBLEMS, SPECULATION CONCERNING THE SURVIVABILITY OF HIS GOVERNMENT HAS CONTINUED UNABATED THIS PAST WEEK. OPINIONS OF A BROAD SPECTRUM OF OBSERVERS CONTACTED BY EMBASSY OFFICERS REVEAL NO CLEAR CONSENSUS REGARDING TANAKA'S FUTURE AND BOIL DOWN TO THE FACT THAT THE SITUATION IS AS YET EXTREMELY FLUID. AT THE SAME TIME, IT MUST BE NOTED THAT THE VIEW THAT THE CURRENT CRISIS HAS SIGNIFICANTLY SHORTENED THE LIFE OF THE TANAKA GOVERNMENT IS GAINING GROUND, ALTHOUGH THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT ITS ULTIMATE FATE WILL NOT BE DECIDED UNTIL AFTER PRESIDENT FORD'S VISIT. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER TANAKA'S DEPARTURE OCTOBER 28 ON HIS 12-DAY VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND BURMA, LEFT POLITICAL CIRCLES STILL BUZZING WITH SPECULATION CONCERNING TANAKA'S CHANCES FOR SURVIVING THE POLITICAL STORM RAISED BY THE BUNGEI SHUNJU
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MAGAZINE'S EXPOSE OF SHADOWY ASPECTS OF HIS BUSINESS AND

PERSONAL BACKGROUND. WITH TANAKA ABSENT, MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL CRISIS HAS BEEN FOCUSED MAINLY ON MEETINGS HELD BY THE VARIOUS LDP FACTIONS TO EVALUATE THE SITUATION AND PLAN THEIR FUTURE MOVES. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, MEMBERS OF THE TANAKA FACTION REAFFIRMED THEIR BELIEF THAT TANAKA WILL BE ABLE TO RIDE OUT THE STORM WHILE OTHER FACTIONS, INCLUDING THE ANTI-TANAKA CAMP LED BY FUKUDA AND MIKI, HAVE DECIDED TO CONFINE THEMSELVES TO DISCREET BACKSTAGE MANEUVERING AND A POLICY OF WATCHFUL WAITING UNTIL TANAKA RETURNS.

2. WHILE THE LOCAL PRESS HAS THUS REFLECTED AN APPARENT LULL IN THE CRISIS OVER TANAKA'S LEADERSHIP, DISCUSSIONS BY EMBASSY OFFICERS WITH A BROAD SPECTRUM OF POLITICAL PARTY AND PRESS CONTACTS DURING THE PAST WEEK REVEAL THAT SPECULATION REGARDING TANAKA'S POLITICAL FUTURE IS IF ANYTHING INCREASING IN INTENSITY. MOST OBSERVERS INCLUDING TANAKA SUPPORTERS AGREE THAT TANAKA IS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE AND THAT HIS OPTIONS ARE VERY LIMITED. ALMOST NO ONE NOW BELIEVES THAT TANAKA WILL BE ABLE TO FALL BACK ON DIET DISSOLUTION AND NEW ELECTIONS AS A FEASIBLE SOLUTION TO HIS PROBLEMS SINCE THE LDP IS NOT READY TO FACE ELECTIONS AT THIS TIME AND THE PARTY IS UNLIKELY TO GO ALONG WITH SUCH A DECISION. THUS, THE ONLY COURSES OPEN TO TANAKA AT PRESENT APPEAR TO BE EITHER TO RESIGN OR TO BE PREPARED TO RIDE OUT THE STORM IN THE DIET. TANAKA SUPPORTERS WHO ADVOCATE THE LATTER COURSE ARE APPARENTLY COUNTING AS FACTORS IN HIS FAVOR DIVISIONS AND RIVALRIES AMONG THE OPPOSITION PARTIES, LACK OF ANY REAL PROOF TO BACK UP CHARGES OF ILLEGAL FINANCIAL DEALINGS, AND THE FEAR AMONG CONSERVATIVES THAT FAILURE TO BACK TANAKA IN THE DIET AT A TIME WHEN COMPLEX PROBLEMS REMAIN UNSOLVED WILL SERIOUSLY HURT THE LDP AS A WHOLE.

3. ACCORDING TO SOME PRESS REPORTS, TANAKA IS PREPARING FOR BOTH POSSIBLE RESIGNATION AND "TOUGHING IT OUT." MAINICHI SHIMBUN NOVEMBER 4 REPORTED FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER AND PARTY VICE PRESIDENT ETSUSABURO SHIINA AS SAYING IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW THAT TANAKA HAD ASKED HIM BEFORE LEAVING ON HIS CURRENT OVERSEAS TRIP TO FORM AN INTERIM "CARETAKER" GOVERNMENT AFTER HIS (TANAKA'S) POSSIBLE RESIGNATION. MAINICHI AND OTHER PAPERS HAVE ALSO REPORTED HOWEVER, THAT "SOURCES CLOSE TO TANAKA" HAVE ANNOUNCED THAT TANAKA IS READY TO RESHUFFLE HIS CONFIDENTIAL

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CABINET AND TO TAKE ON HIS CRITICS IN THE DIET WHEN IT MEETS IN EXTRAORDINARY SESSION AT THE END OF NOVEMBER. AS HIS FIRST MOVE TO RETRIEVE THE SITUATION, TANAKA IS EXPECTED TO REVAMP HIS CABINET SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN FROM ABROAD (NOV 8). HOW EFFECTIVELY TANAKA IS ABLE TO EXECUTE THIS MANEUVER AND THE KIND OF CABINET HE IS ABLE TO PUT TOGETHER WILL BE REGARDED AS IMPORTANT INDICATORS OF HIS INFLUENCE WITHIN THE LDP AND HENCE OF HIS PROSPECTS FOR SURVIVING THE CRISIS. ON THIS SCORE,

ONE OF TANAKA'S CHIEF LIEUTENANTS, FORMER POSTS AND TELE-COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER CHUJI KUNO, TOLD EMBOFF THAT IF TANAKA DOES NOT REORGANIZE HIS CABINET PRIOR TO THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT HE WILL DO SO AFTERWARD BUT THAT HIS FAILURE TO CARRY OUT A PRE-VISIT RESHUFFLE WILL HAVE TO BE INTERPRETED AS DEFINITE SIGN OF WEAKENED INFLUENCE WITHIN HIS PARTY.

4. ALTHOUGH THERE IS BY NO MEANS A FIRM CONSENSUS YET REGARDING TANAKA'S TENURE, AN INCREASINGLY DOMINANT VIEW IS THAT THE LIFE OF THE TANAKA CABINET IS DEFINITELY LIMITED AND MAY NOT LAST AT THE OUTSIDE BEYOND NEXT SPRING. THE SPREAD OF THIS BELIEF WITHIN THE LDP IS CREATING A VERY TENSE AND BRITTLE INTRA-PARTY ATMOSPHERE AS THE VARIOUS FACTIONS EVALUATE THE SITUATION, AND IT IS GENERATING A SPATE OF RUMORS CONCERNING BACKSTAGE MOVES BEING MADE BY THE SEVERAL ASPIRANTS WHO HOPE TO SUCCEED TANAKA. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS ALMOST UNIVERSAL AGREEMENT AMONG OBSERVERS THAT NO BASIC CHANGE IN THE TANAKA LEADERSHIP IS LIKELY TO TAKE PLACE UNTIL AFTER PRESIDENT'S FORD'S VISIT, SINCE NO ELEMENT OF THE LDP WILL WISH TO INTERFERE WITH THE GOJ'S RECEPTION OF AN HISTORIC PRESIDENTIAL VISIT.

5. WE DO NOT FEEL, THEREFORE, THAT WE ARE IN A POSITION TO FORESEE THE EXACT TIMING OR (MANNER) OF THE PLAY-OUT OF TANAKA'S CRISIS. WHILE EVERYONE TELLS US TO WAIT UNTIL HE MAKES HIS MOVE AFTER HIS RETURN THIS WEEK TO JAPAN, WHEN QTE THINGS UNQTE WILL PRESUMABLY BEGIN TO TAKE A DIRECTION, THE FACT IS THAT THE APPARENT GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT HIS DOMESTIC CRISIS MUST BE HELD IN ABEYANCE UNTIL AFTER THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT MEANS THAT A CLEARER SENSE OF TANAKA'S NEAR-TERM SURVIVABILITY MAY HAVE TO AWAIT A CABINET RESHUFFLE, INTRA-PARTY MEETINGS, AND THE ONSET OF THE DIET DEBATE.

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6. THE CORE OF THE PROBLEM IS LESS ONE OF PUBLIC AND RANK-AND-FILE POLITICAL OPINION, WHICH IS CLEARLY AGAINST TANAKA AND IS DOMINATING THE PRESENT TENSE ATMOSPHERE, THAN THE COMPLEX INTERNAL PROCESS OF ARRANGING FOR THE SUCCESSION TO POWER. WEHAVE NO FIRM INFORMATION INDICATING THAT COUNCILS WITHIN THE PARTY HAVE COMMENCED THE INTRICATE NEGOTIATIONS INVOLVING SHIFTS IN FACTIONAL AFFILIATIONS, PLEDGES, AND OBLIGATIONS THAT ULTIMATELY WILL PRODUCE A SUCCESSOR. TANAKA'S FACTIONAL STRENGTH AND THAT OF HIS ALLIES REMAINS A FORMIDABLE COUNTER IN THIS BARGAINING. THERE HAS BEEN TALK OF AN QTE INTERIM UNQTE SUCCESSOR, WITH PARTY VICE PRESIDENT SHIINA AND OTHER PARTY ELDERS MENTIONED AS POSSIBLE CANDIDATES. HOWEVER, DESPITE TALK OF SUCH A POSSIBILITY, THERE HAVE BEEN NO SIGNS THAT THIS KIND OF A SOLUTION IS NEAR DECISION. TANAKA'S ALLIANCE WITH THE FACTIONS OF OHIRA AND NAKASONE

REMAINS GENERALLY INTACT, AND THE MIKI-FUKUDA FORCES HAVE SHOWN NO AGGRESSIVE ABILITY TO EXPLOIT THE PRESENT SITUATION INSOFAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE AT THIS STAGE. AS IS OFTEN THE CASE IN SUCH TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL CRISES, THE OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE LITTLE ROLE EXCEPT PERIPHERALLY IN FANNING PUBLIC OPINION. THE PROFESSIONAL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP PROBLEM OF THE SUCCESSION WITHIN THE GNP IS STILL THE CENTER OF TANAKA'S PROBLEM.

7. WITH THESE THOUGHTS IN THE BACKGROUND, THEREFORE, WE BELIEVE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS, INCLUDING THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH THE BUNGEI SHUNJU ARTICLE, HAVE MADE TANAKA A SHORT-TIMER, BUT WE ARE UNABLE TO SAY YET HOW SHORT HIS TENURE IS LIKELY TO BE. THE CHANCES OF HIS BEING OUSTED BY THE END OF THE YEAR HAVE INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY. WE STILL FEEL THAT HE WILL REMAIN IN POWER THROUGH THE PRESIDENTIAL VISIT.
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